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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Violent Television Programming	)	MB Docket No. 04-261
And Its Impact On Children	)	
	)	

To: The Commission

COMMENTS OF SESAME WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop hereby files these Comments in response to the Commission's July 28, 2004, Notice of Inquiry concerning violent television programming and its impact on children ("NOI").[1]

As a pioneer and leader in the field of educational media, Sesame Workshop strongly believes in the power of television to educate and empower children. We agree with the Commission that "consumption of educational television programming correlates positively to children's school preparedness and may also encourage beneficial social skills and behavioral development."[2] In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, we have specifically found that television can be an effective tool for teaching children and their parents how to confront and deal with violence and disturbing events. For this reason, the Commission should strongly encourage broadcasters to produce and air programming that teaches children positive

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[1] Notice of Inquiry, *Violent Television Programming And Its Impact On Children*, MB Docket No. 04-261, FCC 04-175 (rel. July 28, 2004) ("*NOI*").

[2] *Id.* at ¶ 29 (citing John C. Wright & Aletha C. Huston, *Effects of Educational Television Viewing of Lower Income Preschoolers on Academic Skills, School Readiness and School Adjustment One to Three Years Later*, University of Kansas (1995)).

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strategies for coping with violence, both in the real world and as depicted and reported in the media.

Sesame Workshop has also found that children's television programs that attempt to educate children about conflict resolution and stratagems for the avoidance of violence must be carefully crafted to avoid sending the wrong messages. Even programs that intend to deliver positive messages about avoiding violence can inadvertently give the opposite impression to young children. Using educationally-valid methodologies, Sesame Workshop makes every effort to carefully evaluate its programming before it airs to prevent such results, and believes that other broadcasters creating children's programming should do the same.

AN OVERVIEW OF SESAME WORKSHOP

We have found that one of the best ways to motivate and empower children to learn is to channel their natural attraction to media in constructive ways. Founded in 1968, Sesame Workshop is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping educate children and young people through high-quality and entertaining video programming, related products, and outreach efforts.[3] Sesame Workshop is an industry leader in applying research to the creation of educational media, and in assessing its products' impact on children, families, and caregivers. Using innovative tools, we study children's developmental needs across cognitive, social, and emotional domains, and we use those findings to shape every stage of the creative process.

Sesame Workshop is best known as the creator of *Sesame Street*, now in its 35th season. Over eight million viewers in the United States watch *Sesame Street* each week, and the series has over 74 million "graduates." *Sesame Street*'s influence also extends across the globe: the

[3] Children's Television Workshop changed its name to Sesame Workshop in 2000.

program has aired in over 120 countries, and Sesame Workshop has co-produced over 20 international versions of the show that reflect local languages, customs, and educational needs in countries such as China, Germany, Israel, Jordan, Mexico, and South Africa. *Sesame Street* has won 97 Emmys, more than any other television show in history, and a host of other awards. Most significantly, research has shown that *Sesame Street* has made lasting contributions to children's development. For example, frequent viewers of *Sesame Street* at age two were found to have an advantage in emergent literacy, numeracy and school readiness skills at age five.[4] In addition to fostering cognitive development, *Sesame Street* has contributed positively to children's pro-social behavior.[5]

Other Sesame Workshop television programs include: *Dragon Tales*, a show designed to help preschoolers develop proactive strategies for meeting life's challenges; and *Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat*, a show based on a book by best-selling author Amy Tan that exposes children to the richness of Chinese culture while teaching positive values such as fairness, tolerance, honesty, and cooperation.

Over the years, Sesame Workshop has purposefully extended the reach of each program series and become a diversified educational enterprise serving not only children, but also their parents, teachers and caregivers. In addition to fulfilling its core children's educational program production function, Sesame Workshop currently explores educational applications of emerging media technologies, publishes magazines for children and guides for teachers and parents, produces home videos, computer software and interactive materials, conducts workshops, and

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[4] *See* John C. Wright, Aletha C. Huston, Ronda Scantlin, & Jennifer Kotler, *The Early Window Project: Sesame Street Prepares Children for School*, in G IS FOR GROWING: THIRTY YEARS OF RESEARCH ON CHILDREN AND SESAME STREET (Shalom M. Fisch & Rosemarie T. Truglio, eds., 2001).

[5] *Id.* at 92 (citing I.E. Zielinska & B. Chambers, *Using Group Viewing of Television to Teach Preschool Social Skills,* Journal of Educational Television, 24(2), 85-99 (1995)).

develops child care and after-school programs. And as a recognized leader in the field of child development and media, Sesame Workshop and its expert researchers are frequently invited to address professional conferences and prepare chapters for edited books on these topics, producing work that is widely accepted at peer-reviewed national and international conferences.

DISCUSSION

A. Television Can Play an Important Role in Educating Children About the Effects of Violence.

Although the Commission's *NOI* largely focuses on defining and quantifying violence on television today and assessing what steps the Commission should or should not take to reduce that violence, the Commission also asked for comment on "the pro-social effects of television programming."[6] Specifically, the Commission has asked "[w]hat broadcast or non-broadcast services carry" programming that positively influences children's behavior.[7]

As the leading producer of educational programming for children, Sesame Workshop is uniquely positioned to comment on this portion of the Commission's *NOI*, by describing the programming it produces that helps children cope with aggression and violence in age-appropriate ways. As indicated by our recent study of children in middle childhood, our research has demonstrated that exposure to violence in television programming can have an adverse effect on children.[8] We undertook this study to better understand the developmental needs of children

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6 *NOI* at ¶ 29.

7 *Id.*

8 *See Hopes and Fears of 6- to 11-Year-Olds,* Susan Royer & Kelly L. Schmitt, Sesame Workshop, in COMMUNICATION AND TERRORISM: PUBLIC AND MEDIA RESPONSES TO 9/11, at 215-16 (Bradley S. Greenberg, ed., 2002). This study and Sesame Workshop's November 17, 2003 Final Narrative Report to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation about the study are attached to these Comments as Attachment A.

in the middle years, as a first step toward creating educational media targeted to children between six and eleven. The research was conducted at three strategic points in time: in May, 2000, just after the events of Columbine; in September, 2001, post-9/11; and in May, 2002, at the end of the school year that began with September 11, 2001. Our study found that exposure to television news seems to magnify children's preoccupation with violence — for example, children who watched coverage of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were worried and had trouble sleeping.

While Sesame Workshop's research has shown that children's viewing of violence on television can affect them adversely, our research has also demonstrated that it is possible to use television to address real-world acts of violence in a manner that positively affects children's behavioral development and teaches age-appropriate coping skills. To that end, we use a variety of approaches, including story segments on *Sesame Street*, videos, and public service announcements, to try to teach children how to better come to terms with violence and its effects.

For example, in an effort to help children and parents discuss the events of September 11, 2001, Sesame Workshop created segments for *Sesame Street* that address four important issues that arose in the wake of the terrorist attacks: fear, personal loss, aggression, and cultural inclusion. Later, these segments were packaged as a video that was part of a larger outreach kit entitled *You Can Ask!*.

In the video's segment on fear, Elmo becomes extremely frightened by a fire in Mr. Hooper's store. He confronts his fear of fire when he visits a New York City firehouse and meets real firemen. In the segment on personal loss, Big Bird becomes very upset when his pet turtle returns to the wild, but he is able to understand and move past his loss by talking to Gina, the veterinarian on *Sesame Street*. The segment on aggression — here, bullying — most directly

addresses violence. In that segment, Telly becomes upset when his cousin, Izzy, appropriates Telly's triangle collection and refuses to share it. Telly tries to reason with Izzy, and when that does not work, Telly grabs one of the triangles and the two characters struggle for a few seconds. Eventually, Gordon shows Telly how to convince Izzy to share, and the problem is resolved. Finally, in the cultural inclusion segment, Big Bird is shocked when his friend Gulliver refuses to make friends with anyone who is not a bird. Big Bird eventually convinces Gulliver that differences are a good thing.

While none of the segments addresses explicit or graphic violence, they do use age-appropriate situations to help children and their parents understand and deal with children's feelings in the aftermath of a profoundly violent event such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The *You Can Ask!* video encourages children to ask their parents about events that confuse or upset them, and likewise encourages parents to ask their children whether they are scared or confused.

Sesame Workshop produced 75,000 copies of the *You Can Ask!* video, and distributed them in the New York/Connecticut/New Jersey tri-state area through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Nation's Network of Child Care Resource and Referral, public schools, child care centers, Project Liberty, and the New York State Office of Mental Health and its affiliates, which donated or loaned them to parents and conducted workshops with the materials.

Sesame Workshop also has tried to address violence and its effects in a variety of other contexts. We applied our work from *You Can Ask!* to create a series of crisis-oriented public service announcements ("PSAs"), with titles such as "Keep the Same Old Routine," "Stay Calm," "What Elmo Does When He's Upset," "Tell a Grown-Up," and "Scared," that were aired

as the war in Iraq began. The PSAs provide children with coping skills and urge parents to deal with their children's fears and concerns by playing with them and encouraging their questions, while adhering to daily family routines. One PSA also encourages parents to be mindful of what their children are watching on television to ensure that the children do not dwell on negative imagery.

Sesame Workshop is also currently using its research into the developmental needs of children in the middle years to create a media literacy television program called *The Crumbsnatchers*. As suggested by the findings of the middle childhood study that we conducted, media literacy is a much-needed skill for children, and there is little information available to them about how to navigate all that is available to them. This program will teach 6- to 11-year-olds to think critically about media instead of passively absorbing messages from television, radio, the Internet and other forms of entertainment.

In sum, Sesame Workshop has found that research-based programming that addresses violent and upsetting events can help children understand the causes and consequences of violence, and teach them how to deal with it.

B. Programmers Must Be Careful to Assess the Potential Impact of Any Violent Imagery Included in Television Programming.

While Sesame Workshop believes that violence and upsetting events can be addressed in television programming to better equip children to deal with real events — both in the world at large and in the schoolyard — we have also found that such programming can sometimes have unintended consequences.

In developing new content for educational media, Sesame Workshop typically uses interdisciplinary teams to develop specific educational goals, both cognitive and affective, for

each project, and then to translate those ideas into action. The teams include television producers, educators, researchers, psychologists, child development experts, artists, writers, and musicians. Once a project is ready, the development team evaluates its effectiveness, and then makes whatever changes are necessary to ensure that the project meets its goals. Through this process, Sesame Workshop is able to see how its programs will actually affect children.

Sesame Workshop used this model to do extensive research on the *You Can Ask!* videos before distributing them. Specifically, we tested three out of the four segments in the video to gauge whether they taught children how to cope with the emotionally disturbing events depicted.[9] As described in Attachment B, "Modeling Life Skills on *Sesame Street*: A Response to September 11th," Sesame Workshop asked a group of 107 children to watch the three segments and then interviewed the children afterwards.[10] The children were "asked questions that assessed what they understood about the problem, strategy, and solution demonstrated in the episodes."[11] Sesame Workshop then evaluated the children's ability to use what they had seen in the segments "by asking them to provide verbal and behavioral strategies that they would use themselves and advise to others if confronted with similar situations."[12] The responses were then coded as either pro-social, anti-social, or neutral.

Sesame Workshop found that the segments on personal loss and on cultural differences were highly effective in teaching children positive strategies for addressing these issues. Notably, however, we also discovered that, as originally written and filmed, the segment on

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9 The segment on fear was not studied because the strategy shown for coping with it was employed by an adult (the firefighter) who provided Elmo with information.

10 Rosemarie T. Truglio, Jennifer A. Kotler, David I. Cohen, & Anna Housley-Juster, *Modeling Life Skills on Sesame Street: A Response to September 11th*, at 1-2 (Attachment B to these Comments).

11 *Id.* at 2.

12 *Id.*

bullying actually had the opposite of its intended effect. In that segment, Telly becomes frustrated and angry at Izzy for not returning his triangles, and wants to hit Izzy to get the triangles back. Before he hits him, Gordon intervenes and asks Telly to imagine what would happen if he were to hit Izzy. Telly realizes that if he does so, they will both be hurt and Izzy will still have the triangles, proving that hitting is not an effective strategy. But instead of teaching children that aggressive behavior does not work, the segment "wound up inadvertently validating hitting."[13] Because Telly's struggle with his cousin was presented in a "very entertaining and memorable" way, children seemed attracted to this course of action.[14] As a result of this finding, we edited the bullying segment to downplay the negative interplay between Telly and Izzy.

Sesame Workshop's experience with *You Can Ask!* demonstrates that television programming can help parents and children deal with violence, but only if programmers use valid, proven educational methodologies to carefully evaluate the impact of their programming before airing it.

CONCLUSION

Sesame Workshop applauds the Commission's decision to address the issue of violence on television in this proceeding, and believes that the *NOI* should be the first step in governmental efforts "to encourage more programming choices that have a positive effect on children's development."[15] To this end, the Commission should determine that programming aimed at teaching children how to deal with violence and upsetting events should be considered

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13 *Id.* at 8.

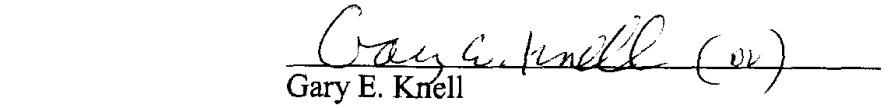
14 *Id.*

15 *NOI* at ¶ 29.

educational and informational programming for the purposes of broadcasters' current obligations under 47 C.F.R. § 73.671, as long as the programming is proven effective using accepted educational methodologies. The Commission should also encourage Congress to make funds available for the creation of such programming, to help children cope with our increasingly frightening and volatile world.

Respectfully submitted,

SESAME WORKSHOP



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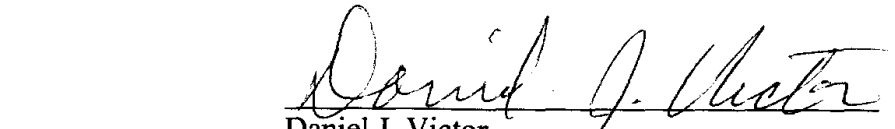
President and
Chief Executive Officer



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October 15, 2004

ATTACHMENT A

sesameworkshop

Who we are

Sesame Workshop is a non-profit educational organization that makes a meaningful difference in the lives of children worldwide by addressing their critical developmental needs.

What we do

The Workshop develops innovative and engaging educational content delivered in a variety of ways -- television, books, magazines, and interactive material such as on-line, CD-ROM's, and video games -- takes advantage of all forms of media and uses those best suited to deliver a particular curriculum. This allows the Workshop to effectively and efficiently reach millions of children, parents, caregivers, and educators -- locally, nationally, and globally.

Why we do it

The Workshop is committed to the principle that all children deserve a chance to learn and grow. To be prepared for school. To better understand the world and each other. To think, dream, and discover. To reach their highest potential.

Hopes and Fears of 6- to 11-Year -Olds

Susan Royer
Kelly L. Schmitt

Chapter16 from **COMMUNICATION AND TERRORISM PUBLIC AND MEDIA RESPONSES TO 9/11**

Edited by Bradley S. Greenberg
Michigan State University
Hampton Press, Inc.

sesameworkshop

Contents

think anything can happen to me" (10-year-old boy, Florida). However, other children identified church and school as a "safe place."

> A church. I feel nothing bad can happen to me because I am in God's hands. When I'm here I fell that nobody can take me away from anything. (11-year-old girl, Brooklyn)

> A school is for learning. Because every year we are there we learn more and more. When we are adults we will be able to run the USA better and safer. (10-year-old girl, Minneapolis)

One other child talked about religion in terms of his hopes for the future. He said that God is his hope for the future, "Cause he created America and everything on Earth. He is so great."

DISCUSSION

Children from across the country appeared to have been affected by the terrorist attacks, which was expressed in their hopes and fears. Proximity to the terrorist attacks was only rarely related to stress reactions. Some of the children, particularly older ones, expressed fears related to September 11, which is understandable because their sense of safety and security was clearly violated. Expressions of hope for America also indicated youngsters' potential to exhibit resiliency, with older children appearing to draw from the strength of the collective community. This is heartening because collective trauma allows one to better cope with the personal impact by knowing others' reactions. Children's feelings appeared to have been validated, which provides reassurance that one is not alone and actively developing an expressive sense of fellowship in grief.

Additionally, children received the message that many more people help than do harm by seeing people across the nation try to join in the efforts to help save lives—by donating blood, money, or time. One way that children can be helped to cope is by allowing them to feel that they are part of the solution. This study suggests that the meanings we assign to events and messages are important to how people respond to events (Berson & Berson, 2001).

Older children had more fears concerning the real-world violent terrorist attacks they had heard about or watched on television not only because of more exposure, but perhaps also because they are better able to understand cause and effect

CONTENTS

Hope for the Future

Our research suggests that national and community connectedness immediately after the terrorist attacks gave children strength. Although a study conducted by Terr et al. (1997) after the *Challenger* explosion indicated that negative views about the future increased over time, in our study children expressed hope for the future, evidenced by mentions of communities rallying together, displays of charity, and a new sense of patriotism. For example, a typical response to a question in our prior study such as "Hopes for the Future" would be "Football. This makes me feel excited because I'm going to play football in High School" (9-year-old boy, Washington, DC). However, about half the children in this study talked about the flag or life in America representing their hope. In our previous research none of the children mentioned America itself as a hope for the future.

Specifically, two fifths of the children talked about the flag representing their hope for the future, and the importance of everyone coming together.

> When I see everybody with Flags. [It shows] that everybody can be friends and help one another. (11-year-old boy, Atlanta)

> American flag. Each star represents a state. Our country comes together in a time of need. (9-year-old boy, Houston)

> American Flag. It show the very best of America because we are United. (10-year-old girl, Houston)

> To see American flags. Because we are all putting American flags out and it shows we're all one! (10-year-old girl, Brooklyn)

In addition, when asked "What makes you proud?" more than one third of the children said the American flag, especially kids from nonaffected areas. A smaller segment of children in the previous study (Royer, 2001) did talk about the flag making them proud, although they did not talk about it as a hope for the future.

Some other children in this study talked about America making them proud, or how their view of America had changed.

> I'm proud to be an American. I'm proud to be an American because we are a powerful nation and we won't let anything take away freedom. Our neighborhood has shown a lot of support since the attack in New York and Washington, DC. (11-year-old boy, Phoenix)

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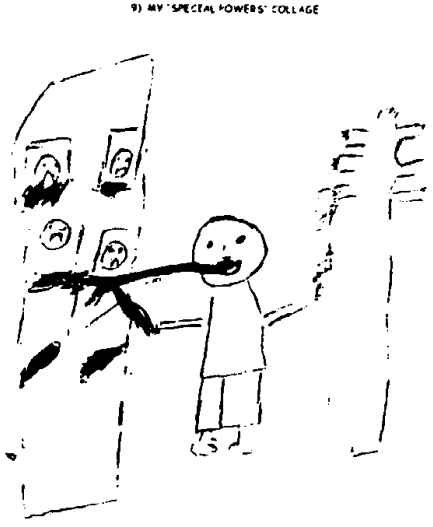
Hopes and Fears of 6- to 11-Year-Olds

Susan Royer
Kelly L. Schmitt
Sesame Street Workshop

The sudden, unexpected terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 shook the nation, causing disbelief, anxiety, and deep grief. As adults attempted to come to terms with what had happened, a key concern was how children would cope with the events. It is no longer believed that children are immune to nightmares and the type of stress that adults experience after suffering psychological trauma (Green et al., 1991; Sleek, 1998; Solomon & Green, 1992); nevertheless, little is known about how American children react to terrorism because so few instances have occurred in the United States.

The most recent terrorist attack, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, provides the most updated understanding of the reaction of children. A large study of the critical needs of children in Oklahoma City conducted 7 weeks after the attack indicated that knowing someone who was killed, or heavy viewing of bomb-related television, was associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms such as trembling or a faster heartbeat (Pfefferbaum et al., 1999). Children's reactions mirrored those of the adults around them,



Male, age 8

Female, age 8

Fig. 16.2. Special powers children would like to have

to 11-year-old children after a massively threatening tragedy, September 11.

Sample

There were 87 children (ages 6 to 11) who participated in this study, with an average of 14 participants at each age. The 87 were recruited from a potential sample of 120 children (73% response rate.)[1] Only children who were aware of the events of September 11 were included. Five children were eliminated by responding negatively to the question: "Recently there has been a lot of news about Washington DC and New York City. Have you heard the news about Washington DC and New York City?" Of the 82 participants (39 girls, 43 boys), 73% were White, 20% were African American, 5% were Hispanic, and 2% were Asian American. The majority of the children (76%) had parents who were married, with the remainder having single, divorced, or a widowed parent. Approximately one third of the mothers had some high school education or a high school diploma, another one third had some technical or college education, and the rest of the mothers had college or postcollege education.

Participants were recruited from shopping malls in 16 geographically dispersed markets. Of the 16 markets, 5 were in urban areas and 11 were within 30 miles of a major city. The criteria for selecting a specific shopping mall within each area was: (a) the mall population represented a broad range of incomes; (b) the mall population was ethnically diverse; and (c) an experienced interviewing organization existed within the mall.

Although this was not a purposive sample, only children with indirect exposure to the events were interviewed (i.e., they were not present at the attacks, and at the time of completing the interview did not know anyone who died as a result of the terrorist attacks). This is worth noting because children directly exposed to the events, such as those who lost a loved one or were displaced from their home or school, deal with different issues (Pfefferbaum et al., 1999). Nevertheless, research conducted after the Oklahoma City bombing indicated that children were "not immune to the effects of witnessing violence whether their exposure was direct or indirect" (Groves, Weinreb, & Augustyn, cited in Castle, Beasley, & Skinner, 1996, p. 1).

[1]An additional 458 potential respondents were approached who were not given booklets. 334 because they did not meet the age quota, were not a legal guardian, did not live in town, or did not read or write English; 76 qualified refusal and 48 were not given booklets because we already had enough participants of a particular age or race.

dads too. It is a scary thing." These fears were personalized to children's own neighborhoods. One child took a picture of the block where she lives because "I worry about terrorists dropping a bomb where I live or crash a plane" (10-year-old girl, Minneapolis). Concerns related to the terrorist attack also came out in response to the question "What are you ashamed of?" The majority of the children talked about the environment (e.g., litter, urbanization), but a small segment expressed being disturbed by the fighting. As one child said, "People who are fighting for no good reason. Because we should be all living together in peace and not fighting about things that don't mean anything" (10-year-old girl, Houston). Another child said "because people kill other people for no reason" (9-year-old boy, Washington, DC). Environmental concern in relation to the terrorist attack was also expressed when an 11-year-old girl from Brooklyn explained she was ashamed of "Burned paper from the world trade bombs. It shows war and destruction."

Heroes

According to Erikson (1980), heroes teach children about their culture and their relationship to society. Heroes may exert their most profound influence on children as examples of possible selves. Oyserman and Markus (1990) contended that possible selves operate as motivators for children. Possible selves include those selves we would like to become, as well as those we fear becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

To address this issue, we asked 6- to 11-year-olds: "Cut out a picture or draw someone famous you would like to be for one day." Children in our previous study wanted to be like pop culture icons such as Britney Spears and The Rock. Girls, in this study, also wanted to be like pop culture icons, especially musicians. Interestingly, boys not only wanted to be like pop culture icons or sports figures. Instead, evidence of wanting to be like real and imaginary heroes such as the president, policemen, firefighters, and even Batman was expressed.

> [I chose] George W. Bush [because] of the bad things going on with the terrorists. (8-year-old boy, New Jersey)

> [I chose] Police Officer [because] They are heros. They help find people. They stop traffic. (6-year-old girl, Washington, DC)

Nine- to 11-year-olds also were asked to photograph someone whom they consider to be a hero. In addition to family members, a small

children to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (2 to 4 weeks) after the event. During this initial reaction period, children may have exhibited intense responses. Our approach relied almost solely on children's own reactions and did not attempt to diagnose PTSD.

It is worth noting that the instruments in this study were used in prior research with 233 different 6- to11-year-old children during the spring of 2000 (Royer, 2001). This earlier research indicated that many children, particularly 9- to 11-year-olds, had anxieties about guns, death, and violence. The anxieties and fears expressed in those booklets were coupled with a strong yearning for the presence of an engaged adult. Grandparents were especially prominent, appearing in nearly half the kid's view booklets. The most common reason for identifying someone as an archetypal figure was, in each case, because "they take care of me." Although the aforementioned sample of 6- to 11-year-olds were different from the present study, they allow for a cross-sectional comparison at two different historical times.

RESULTS

When asked whether they had heard the news about Washington, DC and New York City, 82 of the 87 said they had. The following is based on their responses.

Understanding of September 11 Attack

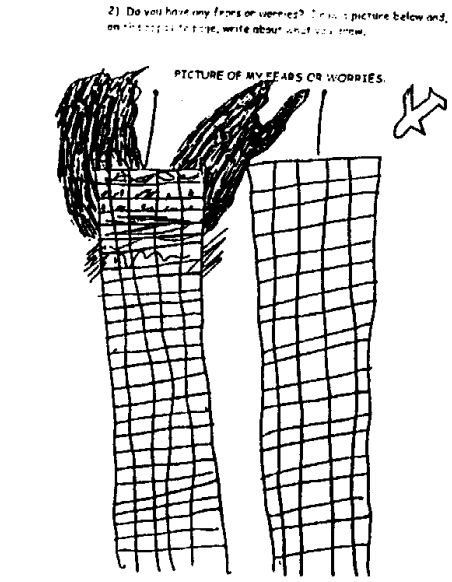
Approximately three quarters of the children reported that planes hit buildings, with some children naming the specific buildings that were hit or targeted.

> The plane crashed into the Pentagon. I know that a lot of people died and it was very evil. It was a dumb plane crash. It crashed into one of the tallest buildings in the world, but I don't know the name. (6-year-old girl, Washington, DC)

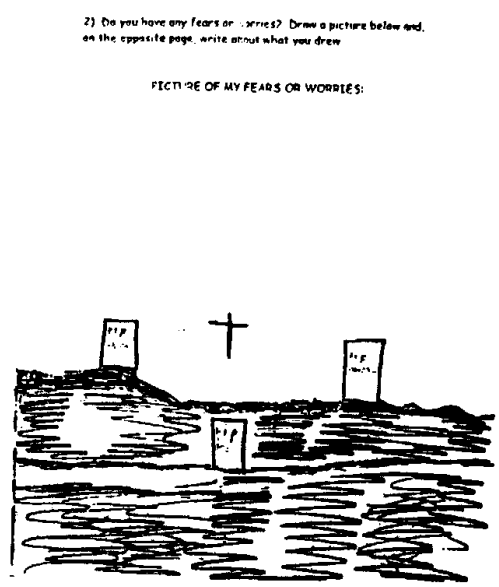
> A plane was going to the Twin Towers and hit them, and one was going for the White House and it crashed in Pennsylvania, and one hit the Pentagon. I think bin Laden is to blame. (11-year-old girl, Washington, DC)

Nearly two fifths of the children also reported that terrorists or bad or evil men were involved.

> A terrorist was in a plane and it had lots of fuel and it crashed into the two twin towers. (10-year-old boy, Florida)



Female, age 11



Male, age 10

Fig. 16.1. Children's fears or worries

One fifth of children had another defensive reaction, feeling angry or frustrated, which was sometimes expressed as vengeance.

> I think we should go beat the bad guys. (6-year-old boy, Denver)
>
> I think we should kick butt, I think that it was wrong what they did. (10-year-old boy, Memphis)
>
> I'm mad because I don't like people to die and we shouldn't hijack planes and I'm sad because people have died. (10-year-old boy, Washington, DC)

Only a few children preferred not to discuss the events, possibly to avoid feeling any emotions related to the events.

Talking About Attack

Children also were asked how often parents, teachers, grandparents, or other adults discussed what had happened with them. Almost all the 9- to 11-year-olds reported that adults talked to them *sometimes* or *a lot*, whereas approximately half of the 6- to 8-year-olds reported talking to adults *not very much* or *not at all*. Presumably, the more frequent conversations with older children reflect their developmental capacity to understand more, as well as the likelihood that they have more questions about what happened. Alternatively, some parents may assume that young children are immune to suffering psychological trauma.

A similar pattern of talking with friends was observed, with 9- to 11-year-olds reporting talking *a lot* much more frequently than younger children. In fact, almost half the 6- to 8-year-olds didn't talk to their friends very much or at all about the events. Conversations with peers also were slightly more frequent in the affected areas.

Acquiring More Information

Children's media consumption regarding the terrorist attacks was comprised mostly of television viewing, followed by listening to the radio or reading newspapers or magazines. Older children were more likely than younger ones to consume each of these communication media.

Children of all ages watched TV news with adults, especially their mothers. Only two children watched the news by themselves, and four children watched with other kids with no adults present. It appears that children were very interested in watching TV news,

Sesame Workshop
Final Narrative Report to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation
November 17, 2003

Celebrating its 35th anniversary year, Sesame Workshop, best known as producers of the Emmy Award winning series, *Sesame Street*, is also an industry leader in applying research to the development of educational media and assessment of its impact on children, families, and caregivers. In July 2002, the Kellogg Foundation generously made a $150,000 grant toward the Workshop's project to develop meaningful programs to address critical needs of and make a difference for Arab-American children through a study of six- to eleven-year olds entitled, *A View From the Middle: Life through the Eyes of Children in Middle Childhood*. We are pleased to report on the results of this work.

I. Project Summary

Two years ago Sesame Workshop identified children in the "middle" years as those not being well-served by media offerings available to them. Unlike their pre-school counterparts, for whom educational media is readily available in the form of television programming, videos and CD-ROMS, children in the middle years have fewer educational media opportunities available to them. Sesame Workshop, in an effort to meet the developmental and educational needs of children this age, began to explore the idea of creating educational media targeted to children between the ages of six and eleven years of age. As a first step in this endeavor, the Workshop conducted research to better understand the developmental needs of children of this age, specifically in the area of achieving mastery and competency. The research was designed to help us to understand how kids this age viewed the world around them.

A. Research Design

Specific areas of inquiry included:

- Who are the heroes in their lives? The Caregivers? The Magicians?
- Where is the "heart of the home? The "scary place" The "safe place"
- What makes them proud to be an American"
- What are worries for the future?
- If they could be famous for a day, who would they be?
- If they could have a special power, what would it be?
- Do they have any fears or worries? If so, what are they?

The research was conducted over the course of two years at strategic points in time—in May 2000, just after the events of Columbine, in September 2001, post 9/11, and in May 2002, at the end of the school year that began with September 11th. The sample size differed for each study and ranged from 87 to 233 children. The response rate for the surveys was high, ranging from 73% to 82%. Participants were recruited from shopping malls in 16 geographically dispersed markets. Of the 16 markets, five were in urban areas and eleven were within 30 miles of a major city. The criteria for selecting a specific shopping mall within each area were: (a) the mall population represented a broad range of incomes; (b) the mall population was ethnically diverse; and (c) an experienced interviewing organization existed within the mall.

In the third phase of this research study, conducted in May 2002, a sample of 50 Arab American children was included. This sample was drawn only from three of the 16 markets: Detroit, Houston and Brooklyn, N.Y. because these markets have sizable Arab American communities. The interviews with these children followed the same protocol and procedures of those with children from across the country.

In the third phase, a focus group of children slightly beyond their middle years of childhood was conducted to probe their perceptions of what the 6 to 11 year-olds were telling us in their booklets. This session was moderated by Dr. Kyle Pruett, Clinical Professor of Child Psychiatry and Nursing, Yale Child Study Center and School of Medicine.

B. Study Procedure

Children were asked about their lives for a time capsule study. They were asked to help create a self-portrait by using cameras, art work, and mini essays to describe their lives. The questionnaire booklet that children were given was entitled, *All About Me*. This booklet contained 18 questions intended to give insight into their internal and external lives. The children were also given a bag of supplies (crayons, scissors, glue stick, and markers) to take home and use to complete the project.

In addition to the *All About Me* booklets, nine to eleven year-olds were given a disposable camera and a second booklet entitled *Kid's View*. In the *Kid's View* booklet there was an archetypal framework. Children were instructed to take a photograph of the person who fulfilled certain roles in their lives (including a caregiver and a hero), places in their world (the heart of the home and the safe place), and their view of the future (hopes, concerns, and source of pride).

All children were given a booklet to complete on their own without parent or interviewer intervention. Parents were given a letter instructing them to feel free to help their child with writing or spelling if they ask for it, but not to "improve" on their child's responses. The opportunity to discuss, write, draw, and express their views seemed to be welcomed by the children.

Participants were instructed to return the booklets in person (within ten to 14 days). A sub sample participated in one-on-one in-depth interviews to probe the answers reflected in their booklets. Each child was given between ten to 14 days to complete the assignment.

In the final phase of the research, children were asked to sort pictures of children of different ethnicities according to a variety of dimensions. For example, we asked children to chose who they wish to be friends with, who would make a good American citizen, who would be fun to get to know, as well as who is the kind of person they know in their everyday lives.

The research served as an important tool to understanding children in middle childhood and as a first step toward creating projects that address their developmental and educational needs in a relevant and engaging context.

The studies were an in-depth exploration of both the external and inner lives of children using this unprecedented approach. The methodology was designed to allow for